

# CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

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VOL. I.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, as I have loved you—JOHN xiii. 34.

## A DISSERTATION,

### ON THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCES OF THE TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

#### PREFATORY CONSIDERATIONS.

THE external evidences of the Divine Origin of the Christian Religion, and of the genuineness and authenticity of the records which we receive as the history of its institution, infinitely surpass, in variety and accumulation, any evidence by which other ancient facts have been readily established and universally believed. This proposition is so manifestly true and incontestable, that it has been attempted, by the adversaries of Christianity, at once to set aside the weight of testimony which we are able to produce in its favour by peregrinary decision;—“that miracles are contrary to experience,—and therefore no human testimony can render them credible.”

It will not be difficult to expose the presumption and weakness of this dogmatical conclusion: and as it presents itself in the very outset of our enquiries, and if admitted, would render it useless to pursue them, it becomes necessary in the first place, to dispose of it.

The objectors no doubt mean by “a fact being contrary to experience,” that it is contrary, not to *their own* experience, for that would be nothing; but that it is contrary to the *general* experience of mankind. That no such thing *was ever* experienced, or that it is contrary to *universal* experience, is to assume the subject of the controversy. Now the *cause* of miracles, the promulgation of a Divine revelation, must be contrary to *general* experience: and that such a revelation was greatly desirable, we may discover, if our own observations on the weakness and insufficiency of human reason do not lead us to do it, by the confessions of some of the wisest heathens.\* It is therefore by no means impossible, or im-

probable, to have taken place; but it is impossible, as far as we can conceive, that a revelation should be *effectually made without miracles*; consequently, in whatever degree it is probable or not impossible that a revelation should be communicated, in the same degree it is probable or not impossible that miracles should be wrought. Miracles therefore, as connected with a purpose so important, so beneficial, and so worthy of the Divine Nature, as a revelation, instead of being incredible, seem to be a necessary part of it: at any rate, it is absurd in any one who allows the possibility of the one, not to admit the possibility of the other, and to insist that miracles, and the facts connected with them, ought to be rejected at first sight, or to be rejected by whatever strength and complication of evidence they are attested.

The belief of a God, and an acquaintance with the history of mankind, will easily lead us to the credibility of miracles,—for in this belief and this knowledge we shall at once discover a sufficient power, and an adequate motive.

The external evidences in favour of the truth of Christianity are made up, as the nature of the case requires of incontrovertible facts, of probabilities and reasonings: and it appears to me to be an advantage, in an argument like the present, to keep the former as distinct as possible from the latter: for the facts being once clearly seen and acknowledged, the deduction from them is so easy and obvious, that it seems impossible to escape or withstand it.

A confused notion of the evidences of Christianity is very favourable to infidelity: and as there are different degrees of strength in probabilities and reasonings, and in some instances they may fail of exciting conviction at all, in this case if they are blended with the facts, a lukewarm inquirer will too frequently shut up the book, with the remembrance that he did not assent to many of its propositions,—and forgetting the nature, tendency, and relative

importance of those to which he did assent, some shadow of doubt is thrown upon the result which is drawn from them all, but which might have been established by a separate consideration of the most incontrovertible. By this distinction also, the caviller who may attempt to undervalue or falsify our statement of probabilities and our reasonings, is confined within narrow bounds; for the common facts having been indisputably established between us, we may the more confidently demand a fairer system of deductions from them, and a more probable solution of the phenomena they contain.

These considerations, and a decided conviction of the bad effect of *overstated* propositions, have guided me in framing the following series, which it will not be difficult to prove to be *absolutely incontrovertible*: and these being established, I shall proceed to shew that there is but one reasonable mode of accounting for the facts of which they are made up; which is, by allowing the **TRUTH** and **DIVINE ORIGIN** of the **CHRISTIAN RELIGION**.

#### Propositions stated.

I. The Christian Religion arose in Judea during the reign of Tiberius Cæsar—Its founder, Christ, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator of that province—The religion was immediately afterwards preached with success in the same country,

II. The state of the world at the promulgation of Christianity, after the death of its founder, presented every possible obstacle to its success,—notwithstanding which, it soon prevailed, and continued to prevail, in a most wonderful degree.

III. The facts which are asserted by the original preachers of Christianity were miraculous, and in the main, the same which are believed by modern Christians, and for the purpose of establishing them, those preachers voluntarily underwent labours, dangers, and sufferings.

\* Plato in *Apolog.* Socrates, Plato in *Alcibiade.* Cicero, *Tusc.*

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IV. Scriptures, containing the discourses of Christ, existed in the time of the contemporaries of the apostles.—Their quotations from them agree with our gospels.—The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and the acts of the apostles, were received as genuine and authentic by the first race of Christians after the apostles, and by the churches which the apostles had instructed.

V. Predictions were delivered to the Jews many ages before the appearance of Christ, which accord with the history which our Gospels give of him,—and at the time of his appearance, a general expectation existed, under impressions unfavourable to Christianity, that these prophecies would then be fulfilled.

*To be continued.*

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FOR THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.  
Remarks on "To 'A FRIEND TO TRUTH  
AND CONSISTENCY.'"

*See No. 43, page 169.*

To "\*\*\*\*."

I welcome the freedom, Sir, you have exercised "in differing from me in considering the mysteriousness of a doctrine an objection to our receiving it as true." But not being convinced at present that your reasons for so differing are properly grounded, I beg to submit a few remarks which occurred to me immediately when I perused your article.

Your first observation upon the subject, is, "To say, there are no mysteries in the Christian Religion which have not been revealed, is, I humbly conceive advancing a proposition which can readily be proved false." You then state "that not one of the doctrines of Christianity can be fully comprehended by us," but immediately after admit, "We may perfectly understand the doctrine as simply stated to be such."

I here beg to ask what more is necessary to be understood? what beyond this is necessary for our belief? or what consistency is there in saying, we do not fully comprehend any doctrine of Christianity, although we may *perfectly* understand any doctrine as simply stated to be such." The two sentiments appear at variance with each other, and as such *one*, (and I think the former) is inadmissible. But I will now give my attention to your "illustration" so called. "The resurrection and change of our bodies after death we have every

reason to believe, will take place." And why, because it is a doctrine of Christianity that is supported by evidence under *such* circumstances, our belief cannot be withheld. You then proceed, "But as to the real nature of this change, or the secondary means by which it will be effected, we are totally in the dark;" then Sir, this point forms no part of revealed truth, it is not discoverable by our reason, therefore, the nature of this "change" or "the secondary means by which the resurrection of the dead will be effected" is not an object of our belief. It is the doctrine of the resurrection *itself* as founded on evidence, we are called upon to believe, and *nothing further*.

You then add, "Even the nature of God, his self-existence, the infinite attributes of his person, his omniscience, his omnipotence are to us all mysteries, totally above our comprehension." Granted, but I do not take it as a consequence, that I am bound to believe *what* the nature of God is, I have no idea of his colour, figure, or the space his existence occupies; therefore, I do not, I cannot, give the assent of my mind to any proposition on any of these points. It is abundantly sufficient that I possess incontestable evidence of the existence of God, or a cause uncaused, and that his power and goodness were adequate to the production of the stupendous effects we behold in the system of creation, without knowing or believing *how* he existed, *how* he possessed such power, or to what extent each of his attributes exists.

You next allow it may be said, that all mysteries (or you might have said, all supposed somethings;) which contradict the established laws of nature or are contrary to the dictates of our reason are to be rejected." I answer certainly, but, at the same time, do not consider "that by this rule I must reject many," or *any* "of the facts recorded in Scripture;" you then observe in defence of this your conclusion, "It is contrary to the established laws of nature, that a human body which in its specific gravity so much exceeds that of water, should be supported by this fluid, and yet the Scriptures record that both Christ and Peter walked upon the surface of the waves." Philosophy has settled this point as an established law of nature, only because the experi-

ments made upon this fluid by *mankind* have uniformly been attended with similar effects. Yet ought it to be said that a difference in operation performed (as this was upon Christ and Peter,) by the hand of the Supreme Being, is contrary to any law he has established? To decide with certainty, whether the miracles recorded in the Scriptures are, or are not, contrary to the laws of nature, it is surely necessary in the first instance to define what *all* the laws of nature are; for, as a writer has observed, "it might be in the power of one *unknown* law in certain cases, to change the effects of such as are known," therefore until I see such a definition, or *evidence*, that miracles are contrary to the laws of nature, I hope to be excused for not believing them to be such. But here let us again exercise our discriminating powers, as it respects the effect of Christ and Peter walking upon the surface of the waves, and the *cause* of that effect; we have credible testimony in favour of the existence of such an effect, and of consequence, my belief therein arises from such testimony; I equally believe from fair principles of reasoning, that there was an adequate cause for the effect, but the *nature* of that cause not being discoverable, I can neither possess a belief nor disbelief respecting this point. The same argument, you will perceive, will equally apply to the case of Lazarus being raised from the dead, or any *other* miraculous event stated in the scriptures, there is, therefore, nothing mysterious in a miracle, which we must or can believe; further, what we find in nature that is incomprehensible, we do not believe; as, "The *mode* in which the blood formed out of the heterogenous substances comprising the food of animals, of the *nature* of the generation and growth of the human body, or the germination of the smallest seed." All we can comprehend upon these and similar points, is, their *effects*; what we see exist, what we understand to be true, we necessarily believe in the existence and truth of; in all cases our belief follows evidences, in the absence of which the pretence of belief is falacious. From these remarks, I conclude that though "the mysteriousness of a doctrine should not be urged as a proof of its falsity;" yet, its *mysteriousness* ought to be urged as a reason for not believing it. Yours, &c.

A FRIEND TO TRUTH AND CONSISTENCY.

*Dialogue between a Universalist and a Limitarian.*

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 170.

*Lim.* I feel satisfied with your reply as it respects the subject of the resurrection, of which the Saviour spake to the Sadducees; but after meditating much on this Scripture, I feel no small embarrassment; for it really seems that Jesus designed to intimate no difference in the condition of people in the resurrection state. He does not say, that some will be equal unto angels, and others in a condition as much worse than they were in this mortal state, as the state of the blessed is better. He does not intimate that some can die no more, but that others will die the *second death*. He does not say that some will be the children of God, but that others will be the children of the devil. He does not say, that some live unto God, but that others live unto the wicked one. But he says; "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live unto him." Now my difficulty lies here; in the 5th of St. John's gospels Jesus says; "The hour cometh in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." Here it is perfectly evident that there is a wide difference between the condition of those who had done good and those who had done evil, and this difference is at the resurrection. Can you, my dear Sir, assist me in reconciling this account with the declaration which the Saviour made to the Sadducees?

*Uni.* I am not certain that I can give you entire satisfaction on the subject which seems to labour in your mind; but I am free to set before you the views which I entertain of this passage, and I hope if you do not see the subject in the same light that I do, that we may be a help to each other in our endeavours after truth.—You will recollect what I have already suggested respecting our Saviour's figurative language. Now, to say the least, there seems to be no part of the context, where this passage is recorded, in the 5th of John, that necessarily confines the subject to the same resurrection as that of which Jesus spake to the Sadducees.—There is no account in this chap-

ter of any dispute on the doctrine of the resurrection, as the great question lay between the Pharisees and Sadducees, as in the other instance. But I am inclined to think that, by taking the thread of our Saviour's discourse, recorded in the 5th of John, as connected with the words which you have just quoted, we shall find some evidence to favour the idea that he was speaking on a subject different from the one in dispute between him and the Sadducees, and that his language may be understood of the figurative kind, more properly than otherwise. See ver. 24, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." In this verse, it is very evident, that our Saviour was not speaking of people's passing from a state of literal death into a resurrection state, but of passing from a moral death into a moral life by means of hearing understandingly the words of Jesus, by which they were to believe on God. The next verse reads as follows: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live." Here again it is evident that the Saviour was speaking in the same moral or religious sense as before. The dead that should hear his voice and live seem the same before mentioned who should pass from death unto life in consequence of hearing his word and believing on him who sent him. Thus far we are clear. Now all that intervenes between the last quoted and the passage to which you allude is the following; "For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself, and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the son of man." Here is not a single word which intimates any change of language or of general subject. But the divine teacher adds; "Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming when all that are in the graves shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." I will here observe that I see no reason why we have not the same good ground for believing that the Saviour used the word *graves*, in this last passage in the same figurative sense, as he

did the words *death* and *dead* just before. I may go further and say, that it appears to me to be doing no small violence to the Scripture under consideration, to force it to change its language from the figurative to the literal, all of a sudden. If these remarks are allowed to set this passage in its true light, then it follows of course that the resurrection of which the text speaks should be understood, not a literal resurrection, but one which answers to the figurative language of the passage. In short, I have long been of the opinion, that the Saviour in this passage, had allusion to the same thing of which the prophet Daniel spake in his 12th chapter. See the text, verses 1, 2; carefully compare these words with Matt. xxiv. 21, and when you have duly considered the subject, be so good as to inform me whether you still continue to view this passage in the 5th of John in any way opposed to the testimony of Jesus respecting the resurrection, in his debate with the Sadducees.

*To be continued.*

### Christian Messenger.

Philadelphia, Saturday, June 3d, 1820.

FOR THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

### TO THE EDITOR.

It may be well enough to say, that the Editor has not frightened us; we feel disposed to try his antidote, as he calls it, and peradventure before long he may begin to think, that there is about light enough thrown on the subject, and say that he is not very tenacious about continuing the discussion, but he may rest assured as long as this paper admits our pieces, we will not be put off from our object, to outroot the doctrine of Antinomianism. The Editor, in objection to my deducing the rationality of future from present misery, observes that the saints on this principle would suffer; I ask, does the effect continue when the cause has ceased? I think it will be answered no! What then was the cause of our God and Saviour being a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief? and what is it that since the dawn of the gospel day, has poured tribulation and trial on the saints of the Most High? Is it not wicked men? certainly, for what anguish could assail a world of saints?

If then this is the cause, remove it, let the wicked cease from troubling. Let the glittering sword of omnipotent justice, cut the sinner off, and the righteous are happy. The Universalist calls Christian when applied to me (perverted name) that is, because I do not believe in a doctrine, which any Deist who despises the Bible holds to, and which some Arab tribes believed without any knowledge of the name of Christ. It is very common for preachers of Universalism to exclaim in the pulpit, "What! would an all *merciful* God doom his creatures to endless misery, before they could commit sin? Would he not rather stamp non-entity upon them, than create to make miserable?" very pathetic! suppose, we alter a word, the sentence will then differ in *degree*, not in *kind*. "What! would an all merciful God doom his creatures to (present) misery, before they could commit sin? Would he not rather stamp non-entity upon them, than create to make miserable." When this is answered, so is the first. These preachers forget that God's mercy is as glorious in destroying his enemies, as in salvation, "he overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea"—why? "for his *mercy* endureth forever."

The paper is mislaid which contains the Editors remarks, I will therefore close for the present, determined to support my name as a

CHRISTIAN.

—oo—

REPLY.

"A Christian," should have shown that we have advanced the doctrine of "Antinomianism," and wherein, before he had undertaken to *root it out*!

Christian asks, "Does the effect continue when the cause has ceased?" We answer no—and therefore when sin is finished, and an end made to transgression; misery, as its effect, will not continue. Christian may enjoy, unenvied, all the happiness there is to be enjoyed in contemplating the idea that the wicked are to be *cut off*, and yet remain as wicked as ever!

In regard to the reflection cast upon the Universalist, by coupling him with the "Deist," and "Arab," we will only say, "Dost thou know what manner of spirit thou art of?"

A very good, merciful and affection-

ate father might, under certain circumstances, very consistently doom his beloved son to seven years toil and labour, with reference to his future usefulness in life. But what motive can we find in dooming any creature to endless misery that would not better comport with the character of the most merciless *tyrant*, than the *Father of our spirits*? Thus much in reply to what "A Christian" has seen fit to say to our former remarks. We have a few questions to propose to him for his further investigation, and wish him, if possible, to come right to the point. We by no means undertake to vindicate all the writings of Z, but in refuting them, it is desirable that the writer should be consistent. Will Christian be so good as to answer the following questions?

1. How does it appear that "Man is evidently conscious of existence before external objects operate upon him?" See page 171.

2. How does consciousness lead "man to expect a duration, after his mortal part has mouldered in the clods of the valley?"

3. Does Christian believe that "matter is eternal," which he says, that *we* "forget;" and is he not then a materialist?

4. Does Christian believe that the "magnetical attraction," is something distinct from, and independent of, matter, merely because he cannot see it?

5. When the powers of taste and feeling are destroyed, and until they are restored in the resurrection, how can the soul either endure "the pangs of hell," or "taste the joys of bliss?"

6. If the soul "assumes spiritual organs" previous to the resurrection, of what use is the resurrection?

7. If the soul does not die with the body, what does St. Paul mean, (1 Cor. xv. 16—18.) by saying, "If the dead rise not—then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished?"

8. Will not immortality be conferred on those who shall not "sleep," but shall be "changed?"—and may they not be "caught up," with those who shall be raised, "to meet the Lord in the air, and so be forever with the Lord?"

Let "Christian" answer these questions, and we will give his answers a place in the Messenger.

FROM THE UNIVERSALIST MAGAZINE.  
RELIGION RECOMMENDED TO YOUTH.

"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth."

As that which is learned in youth is more permanently fixed in the mind, than what is acquired in more advanced years, it should remind us all, and especially youth, that those things which are of the highest interest to human welfare should be sought and obtained, before the mind becomes crowded with a multitude of worldly cares, and transitory concerns. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." This, of all subjects of human contemplation, is of the greatest moment. Think on God; meditate his consummate wisdom, knowledge, power and goodness.—And endeavour to realize that nothing unlike God, can promote the happiness of rational beings. By endeavouring to acquire wisdom, we endeavour to imitate our heavenly Father. By exerting all our abilities to gain useful knowledge, we seem to approximate to the divine character. By rising above the weakness of fleshly passions, we seem to attain divine strength. And by exercising a spirit of universal love and goodness, we imitate that attribute of Divinity which gives worth and dignity to all the rest. Let the youthful mind be sown with these acquirements, and generally speaking, the harvest will be plenteous in old age.

Subscriptions for the Christian Messenger will be received at Mr. Lewis Boden's No. 78 Green street, as also at No. 343 Market street, and No. 187 South Front street, where the back numbers, if any should have been missed, may also be obtained.

POETS' CORNER.

ACROSTIC.

Retir'd from all those senseless scenes of life,  
Engend'ring woe, enkindling wrath and strife,  
Be thine, the noblest of the human kind,  
Engaging art, to cultivate the mind.  
Calmly resign'd to all below the skies,  
Calmly engag'd in all that's good and wise,  
Avoid the ill, and virtue only prize.

Beyond these chequer'd scenes of good and ill,  
Unbounded love shall all with glory fill,  
Restore to life the kindred of our race,  
Devoid of sin, as trophies of his grace.  
Enraptur'd songs shall make the heavens resound,  
Nor pain nor death in all the world be found.

ED.